

POETRY

Raising the Dead

MRIs failed to detect any spirit. Sonography
probed for an echo; dead seriousness responded
as the red blood cell count hovered a nanobot
above hopelessly dreary. Topnotch surgeons

injected endorphins, went in there determined
to come up with an optimistic sign. They explored
coronal suture for a cracked smile, found only
fissured frowns. Transcranial magnetic simulation

homed-in the humor zone. Electric stimulation
of both nuclei accumbens turned up zero. They
tickled tarsi and phalanges with feathers, tapped
ulnar ligaments for funny-bone twinge, didn't

get a semblance of mirth. Poking around the ribs
for a giggle, MDs traced the nerve to a punch-line
that could elicit a sidesplitter reflex. The features
remained deadpan, so they elected to administer

an enema. The total bill broke the World Bank
of Records, yet the pulse didn't blip. Desperate
for a breath, the team conferred, unanimously
agreed they had operated on the wrong patient.

Symptoms

I long to hold a strand of light,
and a grave yawns like a hippo.

Bending
to sniff a flower,
I grow rigid as concrete.

I want to dream,
instead see only
the wrinkled flesh of my lust.

I go to honor the ones I love,
and mud fouls my hands.

Tears of sorrow overflow,
when I begin to laugh.

I stretch every ligament of wisdom toward
a branch of knowledge,

unwind every convoluted journey
of weathered understanding
in the orbits of my nerves

to grasp an idea of life—
and a blade of grass cuts me.

The final trace of hope vanishes,
and a spirit flies out
taunting . . . *Let's boogie!*

Biographical Note: Bruce Lader (Bridgesbl@aol.com) is the author of five published volumes of poetry. *Discovering Mortality* (March Street Press, 2005) was a finalist for the 2006 Brockman-Campbell Book Award. His third full-length book, *Fugitive Hope*, is forthcoming from Cervená Barva Press. Winner of the 2010 Left Coast Eisteddfod Poetry Competition, his poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Roanoke Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Harpur Palate*, *Confrontation*, *New Millennium Writings*, and other journals and anthologies. He has received a writer-in-residence fellowship from The Wurlitzer Foundation, and is the Director of Bridges Tutoring, an organization that educates multicultural students. Additional information can be found at www.brucelader.com